



New York City Council
Committee on Finance Hearing
New York City Department of Finance

**Testimony of Michael Hyman
First Deputy Commissioner**

June 12, 2017

Good morning, Chairwoman Ferreras-Copeland and members of the Committee on Finance. I am Michael Hyman, First Deputy Commissioner at the NYC Department of Finance (DOF). With me today is Samara Karasyk, Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs.

Pre-Considered Intro 6286

DOF supports Pre-Considered Intro 6286, legislation that would establish that the maximum exemption allowable on qualifying residential real property under the Alternative Veterans Tax Exemption shall be the lesser of \$48,000 or \$48,000 multiplied by the latest class ratio for wartime veterans, \$32,000 or \$32,000 multiplied by the latest class ratio for the additional benefit provided combat veterans, and \$160,000 or \$160,000 multiplied by the latest class ratio for the additional benefit provided veterans with service-connected disabilities.

The new maximum exemptions established with this legislation would expand Alternative Veterans Exemption to the 41,100 Veterans who currently receive the benefit. DOF estimates that based on FY'17 recipients, the additional savings of this expanded exemption would be \$595 annually. This is in addition to the existing average annual benefit of \$545. If passed, this would bring the total Alternative Veterans average exemption to \$1,140 for FY'18.

Intro 1176

Due to the very short notice of this hearing, we are not able to fully review and comment on Intro 1176, legislation that requires budget documents to be provided in certain formats, but we look forward to discussing it with you in the future.



Two Penn Plaza ■ Fifth Floor ■ New York, New York 10121

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Monday, June 12, 2017

“Testimony in Support of Introduction 1176 of 2016, the ‘Open Budget Act’”

Good morning. I am Mariana Alexander, Research Associate at the Citizens Budget Commission (CBC). The mission of CBC is to achieve constructive change in the finances and services of the New York State and New York City government. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Introduction Number 1176 would require the Office of Management and Budget to make relevant budgetary documents available on (1) the city’s website; (2) the ‘NYC OpenData’ web portal; and (3) via an open application program interface in both a human-readable format and formats that permit automated processing, such as an Excel or CSV spreadsheet.

In carrying out its mission, CBC depends heavily on the availability of up-to-date budgetary documents including, but not limited to, the preliminary, executive and adopted budgets and their supporting schedules and the Mayor’s Management Reports. For budget watchdogs like us, the availability of data in “open” formats has significantly aided the speed and ease with which we can do our work.

CBC supports the proposed legislation as it will ensure the continuing accessibility and usability of budget data, ultimately facilitating transparency and accountability in the budget process. We also offer two recommendations:

- (1) Add the Preliminary and Final Mayor’s Management Reports, produced by the Mayor’s Office of Operations, to the list of documents that should be available on these platforms so as to facilitate the link between agency performance and budgeting.
- (2) Require the Office of Management and Budget to make public a document reporting prior fiscal year actual spending in a format similar to the Supporting Schedule, providing data by agency, unit of appropriation and budget code.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I’m happy to answer your questions.

Founded in 1932, the Citizens Budget Commission is a nonpartisan, nonprofit civic organization devoted to influencing constructive change in the finances and services of New York State and New York City governments.

Dear Chair & Committee,

Infinite building power begins with having the right tools. The right tool, in this case, is accessible data. Supporting the Open Bill Act is vital because having searchable data will give room for engineers to develop ways to translate dense information into things that more people can understand. This in turn, will give citizens the ability to be involved in decision that affect them.

As a software product manager, there are numerous examples in my professional experience that have opened my understanding of what can be done when the right people and data come together. I've seen this done at hackathons which are hardware and software competitions where developers gather to solve complex problems in roughly 24 hours. At Hackathons, companies or governments often provide hackers with data in the hopes that engineers will take that information and use it in a way that makes it useful.

At the 4th annual Houston Hackathon for example, a developer used Houston's government budget data and created a program that allowed citizens to see where budgetary spending was happening on a map. The visualizer also utilized data such as property value deltas or park permits on a map creating spending transparency in Houston.

At IBM's Big Data for Social Good Hackathon in Chicago, a team of 4 utilized the City of Chicago's data portal to import business license data and U.S. Census Bureau website data, and IBM's Bluemix to create another visualizer that allowed citizens to see where business licenses were being issued and where businesses were setting up shop. The goal behind this was to allow prospective owners to locate "business desserts" and locate their business in places they would be most competitive. This in term helps the local government economy.

Those are just two small examples of what was done in a very short time when data was made accessible to people. In both cases, cryptic databases and files were transformed to clear visualizations that are easy to understand which created new value for that information. Supporting the Open Bill Act would be a steps towards having more of this.

As the world is rapidly changing with technology, data-driven decision are becoming a must. If there is being time taken to write and collect the information in these documents, it only makes sense for the information to be used in the most intelligent ways and that will sometimes require computer processing power. With that, it's clear that if government must grow to keep up with the world around it, growth in this case begins with supporting the Open Bill Act.

Work Cited:

Alexander, Cameron. "Vital Houston." *Devpost*. 4th Annual Houston Hackathon, 27 May 2015. Web. 10 June 2017.

Galewsky, Ben, Matt Defano, William Casperson, and David Selvaraj. "Oasis." *Devpost*. Big Data for Social Good, 8 Apr. 2015. Web. 12 June 2017.



**New York City Council Finance Committee Hearing
Monday, June 12, 2017, 10:00 a.m.**

Testimony Re: Preconsidered Int. No. _____ - In Relation to Amending the Alternative Veterans Tax Exemption to Establish the Maximum Exemption Allowable on Qualifying Residential Real Property

Legal Services NYC hereby submits these comments in support of the New York City Council Finance Committee's efforts to set a maximum amount for real property tax exemptions for wartime and combat veterans and for veterans with service connected disability.

Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of free legal services in the nation. We have offices in all five boroughs where we serve over 90,000 New Yorkers annually. Our Veterans Justice Project (VJP) provides free civil legal representation in the areas of housing law, public benefit eligibility, family law and other civil legal matters to low-income veterans, active duty service members and their dependents.

Last year we testified before this Committee urging you to enact the Alternative Veterans Tax Exemption from Real Property Taxes. An exemption in property taxes greatly benefits veteran homeowners in New York City because as members of this Committee are well aware, veteran homeowners who fall behind on paying their property taxes can accrue massive debts when tax liens are placed on their homes. For veterans who may already be financially vulnerable, an added tax lien with huge interests and penalties is almost impossible to pay. This is particularly true for veterans who receive service connected disability benefits from the Veteran Administration. Should these veterans, who are on a fixed income, become subject to tax liens for

Legal Services NYC
40 Worth Street, Suite 606, New York, NY 10013
Phone: 646-442-3600 Fax: 646-442-3601 www.LegalServicesNYC.org
Raun J. Rasmussen, Executive Director
Susan J. Kohlmann, Board Chair

failure to pay their property taxes, they will never be in a position to fulfill their obligations and thereby be at risk of losing their homes.

The Alternative Veterans Tax Exemption eases the tax burden on veterans so fewer veterans will have to face the harsh choice of selling their homes or face foreclosure due to unpaid property taxes. Establishing a maximum amount for a veteran tax exemption will make veterans aware of their potential tax liability thereby lessening their anxiety and concern about potential increases in real property taxes that could have a significantly adverse financial impact. This amendment to the City Code makes clear what the maximum allowable property tax exemption will be for wartime and combat veterans, as well as for veterans with service connected disabilities. It is a great step in potentially decreasing the tax burden on low income veteran homeowners.

It was prudent that the City enacted the Alternative Veterans Tax Exemption from Real Property Taxes law. We now commend this Committee for seeking to amend the law by establishing the amount of maximum allowable tax exemptions for residential properties owned by veterans

Thank you for giving Legal Services NYC the opportunity to submit these comments. By amending the City's administrative code to institute maximum tax exemptions for veteran property taxes, the City has taken another great step in recognizing veterans for their service.

Audrey Carr, Esq.
Director, Veterans Justice Project
Legal Services NYC

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 12 Jun 2017

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kristen Kousc

Address: 180 S Oxford #2 Brooklyn 11217

I represent: NYC Veterans Alliance

Address: P9 Box 532 NY NY 10159

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1176 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: June 12 2017

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mariana Alexander

Address: 2 Penn Plaza NY NY 10121

I represent: Citizens Budget Commission

Address: 2 Penn Plaza NY NY 10121

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1176 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 12 June

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NOEL HIDALGO

Address: 65 DRIGGS AVE

I represent: BETA NYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Hyman - 1st Deputy Com - DOR

Address: Sahara Karasik - AC - EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

I represent: Dept of Finance

Address: One Centre St 22nd Floor

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sahara Karasik - AC - EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Address: One Centre St, 22nd Floor

I represent: NYC Dept of Finance

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms